

**SHREWSBURY PUBLIC SCHOOLS
100 MAPLE AVENUE
SHREWSBURY, MASSACHUSETTS**

MINUTES OF SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING

Wednesday, March 4, 2020

Present: Ms. Sandy Fryc, Chairperson; Ms. Lynsey Heffernan; Mr. Jason Palitsch; Mr. Patrick Collins, Assistant Superintendent for Finance and Operations; Ms. Amy B. Clouter, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum & Instruction; Dr. Jane Lizotte, Assistant Superintendent for Community Partnerships & Well-Being; Ms. Meg Belsito, Assistant Superintendent for Student Services; and Dr. Joseph Sawyer, Superintendent of Schools.

Not present: Mr. Jon Wensky, Vice Chairperson; Dr. B. Dale Magee, Secretary.

A complete audio/visual recording of this meeting is available on the Shrewsbury Public Schools website.

The meeting was convened by Ms. Fryc at 7:00 pm.

I. Public Participation

None.

II. Chairperson's Report & Members' Reports

None.

III. Superintendent's Report

Dr. Sawyer congratulated Shrewsbury High School's (SHS) FIRST Robotics Team on winning (again) the Chairman's Award in New Hampshire, the Speech and Debate Team on hosting another successful Mardi Gras competition at SHS and tying for first place, and provided an update on the district's communications, planning, and response to the Coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak.

IV. Time Scheduled Appointments:

None.

V. Curriculum

None.

VI. Policy

A. Revised Policy on Public Participation at School Committee Meetings: Second Reading & Vote

Ms. Fryc noted that no feedback had been received from the public since the first reading of the draft of the policy at the meeting on February 12, 2020. Mr. Palitsch added that the policy does not include a time requirement to notify the Chair for members of the public who would like to speak at a meeting. Noting there might be occasions where a seventh speaker would like to engage in public comment in a meeting, Ms. Heffernan made a motion to amend the draft policy by adding the verbiage “unless otherwise determined by the Chairperson” at the end of the last sentence of item 5 in the rules and procedures section that states “No more than six (6) speakers will be accommodated at any individual meeting,” and Mr. Palitsch seconded the motion. On a motion by Ms. Heffernan, seconded by Mr. Palitsch, the Committee voted unanimously to approve the amended revised Policy 123: Public Participation at School Committee Meetings.

B. Interdistrict School Choice: Recommendation for 2020-2021 School Year

Mr. Collins provided historical information on the district’s decisions to open school choice seats and any resulting associated revenue. Dr. Sawyer advised that previously seats were opened when vacancies could be filled without incurring additional costs. He noted that currently, given space limitations and uncertainty at the elementary level, the recommendation was to not add additional school seats, adding that a public hearing would be held later in the meeting - and prior to a vote by the Committee - per state law.

VII. Finance & Operations

A. Fiscal Year 2020 Budget: Update

Mr. Collins noted that this was the second update on the FY20 Budget; noted it represented budget status as of February 20, 2020; projected a year-end surplus of approximately 1.4%; described budget categories that exhibited a variance of greater than 5%; and noted that budget managers in the district had been asked to turn back 10% of their current budgets, with approximately 5% estimated to come back.

In response to questions from the Committee Mr. Collins provided additional information on the types of site-based funds being turned back (books and classroom supplies), variability of out of district transportation costs going forward, and Educational Contracted Services for special education students. Dr. Sawyer added that a freeze on conferences had been implemented for the remainder of the fiscal year for the Leadership Team (not including those already approved or deemed critical).

G. Acceptance of Grant Funding: Vote

Ms. Fryc advised that this agenda item was being addressed out of order.

Regarding a grant to support financial literacy for students, Dr. Sawyer and Mr. Todd Bazydlo, SHS Principal, described the “Credit for Life” fair being held at the high school on April 7, 2020, which would be supported in part by a grant from the MA State Treasurer’s Financial Education Innovation Fund. Mr. Bazydlo noted that this year, in addition to teaching students financial

literacy skills, the fair would also incorporate a health and well-being component, and noted that costs associated with the event included speakers, books, and materials.

On a motion by Mr. Palitsch, seconded by Ms. Heffernan, the Committee voted unanimously to accept the \$2,500 grant funds noted as the “State Treasurer’s Financial Education Innovation Fund.”

Relative to a targeted grant for Local Education Agencies (LEAs) identified with significant disproportionality in special education for the 2019-2020 school year, Dr. Sawyer provided background information on SPS being designated as such. Ms. Belsito noted the initial grant of \$8,000 would be targeted towards providing Professional Development (through the lens of the MA Tiered System of Support) to Leadership Teams in the district, with Mr. Collins adding that this was a competitive grant, not an allocation grant.

On a motion by Mr. Palitsch, seconded by Ms. Heffernan, the Committee voted unanimously to accept the \$8,000 grant funds noted as “FY2020: Significant Disproportionality in Special Education Targeted Federal Program Improvement Grant.”

B. Fiscal Year 2021 Budget: Recommended Cost Reductions

Dr. Sawyer began his report by acknowledging how the district’s mission, core values, vision, and Strategic Priorities inform decision making relative to the budget; noting similarities and differences between the FY21 Budget and prior years; and noting significant cost drivers that make a status quo budget unsustainable next year. He described how the district plans to mitigate the budget gap and the planning guidelines utilized; provided a detailed, line-by-line description of cuts to Operations and Personnel/Programs; noted current cost-saving measures and the potential for raising fees to generate additional revenue; and acknowledged how the town’s structural funding dilemma compromises the quality of the educational program in Shrewsbury.

Committee members noted that the structural funding dilemma raises predictable and ongoing funding problems for the district and town and expressed concerns over the degree and scope of the proposed budget cuts. In response to questioning, Mr. Collins provided information on administration costs at SPS relative to other communities in the state (at \$327/student, per pupil spending is 42% below the state average), and Dr. Sawyer added that a second Public Hearing on budget would be held at the March 18, 2020 meeting.

C. Fiscal Year 2021 Fees: Recommendation

Dr. Sawyer noted that information on fees had been presented at the meeting on February 12, 2020. In response to questions posed at that meeting by the Committee, Mr. Collins presented additional information on music lesson fees and the associated district costs; a music lesson rate comparison; detailed information on how many students pay fees, or fees and tuitions; and gave different family fee and tuition payment examples from the 2018-2019 school year. Dr. Sawyer summarized his recommendation on adjusting fees, noting later that the new athletic fee proposed for Oak Middle School (OMS) would be effective with the Spring 2020 season.

Committee members expressed concern that increasing fees would put an additional burden on families, but noted they reluctantly support the fee recommendations because additional revenue is necessary to maintain programs and opportunities for students.

D. Public Hearing on Fiscal Year 2021 Budget & School Choice

The public was provided with an opportunity to provide input to the Committee and the administration regarding the FY21 Budget and/or School Choice. The Public Hearing was opened by Ms. Fryc at 8:54 pm.

Community member Mark Adler asked for clarifying information on bus fee family caps, and requested that family caps on fees be reconsidered, citing concerns around equity. Community member and SPS Teacher Guinevere Molina asked for additional information on the loss of preschool student slots (Parker Road Preschool Principal Lisa Robinson provided the response) and expressed concerns regarding losses to the foreign language and literacy tutor programs.

On a motion by Mr. Palitsch, seconded by Ms. Heffernan, the Committee voted unanimously to close the Public Hearing at 9:07 pm.

E. Interdistrict School Choice for 2020-2021: Vote

On a motion by Mr. Palitsch, seconded by Ms. Heffernan, the Committee voted unanimously to not participate in interdistrict school choice for the 2020-2021 school year.

F. Fiscal Year 2021 Fees: Vote

Ms. Fryc noted no feedback had been received from the public regarding fees since the last meeting, and Ms. Heffernan advised she had received one anonymous letter from a parent regarding fees. Discussion ensued regarding delaying a vote on some/all fees to allow more feedback from the community prior to a vote, with members noting that implementing a delay would probably not impact the outcome of the vote. In response to questioning, Mr. Collins advised that deferring a vote on fees would not be problematic, except for the OMS athletic fee, which was time-sensitive. The Committee opted to vote on just the OMS athletic fee.

On a motion by Mr. Palitsch, seconded by Ms. Heffernan, the Committee voted unanimously to approve the implementation of an athletic fee at Oak Middle School, effective immediately, of \$100 per sport per season, with a family cap of three fees per year.

G. Acceptance of Grant Funding: Vote

Please see above.

VIII. Old Business

None.

IX. New Business

None.

X. Approval of Minutes

Without objections from the Committee, the minutes from the School Committee Meeting held on February 12, 2020 were accepted as distributed.

XI. Executive Session

None.

XII. Adjournment

On a motion by Mr. Palitsch, seconded by Ms. Heffernan, the Committee unanimously agreed to adjourn the meeting at 9:14 pm. Roll call votes were as follows: Ms. Heffernan, yes; Mr. Palitsch, yes; Ms. Fryc, yes.

Respectfully submitted,

Elizabeth McCollum, Clerk

Documents referenced:

1. Existing School Committee Policy 123
2. Draft Updated School Committee Policy 123
3. School Choice Recommendation Memo
4. FY20 Budget Status Update
5. FY21 Recommended Cost Reductions Memo?
6. FY21 Recommended Cost Reductions Slide Presentation
7. FY21 Fee Recommendation Memo
8. FY21 Fee Recommendation Slide Presentation
9. Financial Education Innovation Fund Grant Memo
10. FY2020 Significant Disproportionality Grant Memo
11. Set(s) of minutes as referenced above